

BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:24-35

Intro

One of the great images in all of Christendom is the picture of the feeding of the five thousand. All these people climbing the hillside to be close to Jesus because of the signs of healing that they had seen him perform.

However, what do you do when lunch rolls around?

As Phillip in verse 7 of chapter 6 says, "six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

It is at this point in John's version of the story that Andrew brings forth the boy who would supply those initial five barley loaves and two fishes that would then be miraculously multiplied to feed all those assembled.

It's a great story.

There is a problem however. The people of Israel, historically, were not unaccustomed to receiving miraculous feedings. During their days in the wilderness, under the leadership of Moses, the people were showered with manna. With that sort of story in your historical DNA, they took what Jesus did with the feeding of the 5000 and begin to think of Jesus in much the same way that their ancestors thought of Moses: as someone who served their base desires.

What our passage this morning revolves around is Jesus attempt to shake the Israelites out of this understanding so that they might see that what Jesus was offering was so much greater than one's belly being filled.

What I would like you to consider is this: in regards to your faith, who are you more like: the Israelites who longed to have their bellies filled with earthly bread, or the people who had all their needs addressed by trusting in the One who was the bread of life? The scripture reads this way.

John 6:24-35

²⁴ So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?" ³¹ Our ancestors

ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " 32 Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

"Bread of Life"

"I am the bread of life."

This is the statement that Jesus leaves with the group of people who have followed him after the feeding of the five thousand. The imagery of this phrase was brought to life for me in an extremely memorable way a long time ago as I sat in the gym stands of the high school that was housing us for a youth mission trip. I don't remember the location, but the visual illustration that was offered during that program has remained with me.

On the table, which was located in the center of the 'stage' was large basket that was covered by a white cloth. When this cloth was removed, to be laid out on the end of the table, it revealed a large number of bread loaves. These loaves were carefully removed, one after the other, until the basket appeared to be to be empty, at which point the program leader placed the basket on the floor.

She then began to slowly, methodically, with almost dance-like precision, position and reposition these loaves of bread. After several minutes, the table began to hold what looked like a stick figure made of bread. There was a torso, legs, arms. There was no way that you could miss the shape.

It was at this point that she reached back into the basket and pulled out a round loaf of bread and placed it so that the body of bread was completed. She then reached down and gradually pulled the cloth over the stick figure. She tucked the cloth in, just slightly, and in that instance, the bread that was below the fabric was no longer bread: it was the sacrificial body of Jesus Christ.

As I read the passage for this week, I could not help but remember this image, a body below a cloth; a body made of bread.

What Jesus is asking us to understand is that the bread that he offers is bread that provides so much more than a full stomach. We have to decide whether or not we are willing to partake of this bread, this bread of life. Are we willing to believe and trust in the power of God as found in the person of Jesus?

This was the question that was put before the people who were following this man from Nazareth. They had experienced the miracles that came through his hands, through healings and most recently the feeding of the 5000. But were they really ready to commit and make the decision as to what and who they believed in? Jesus says as much when he makes the statement, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me ... because you ate your fill of the

loaves.” Jesus wants them to follow, not because their stomachs are full with the perishable bread that comes of the earth, but instead because he is the true bread from heaven, the bread that will answer all their needs.

Now hunger, as all of us know, is one of the basic needs that all of us look to satisfy, whether that be for ourselves, or our families. This was why the transformation of five loaves and two fishes into a meal that could feed so many had garnered such loyalty from the people.

And, as we talked about before we read the passage, addressing the physical hunger that was there was something that, historically, the Israelites understood. That is why the topic of manna comes up in their conversation with Jesus. Moses had fed the people’s ancestors while they traversed the wilderness, and they followed. Jesus had now fed the people, and it is obvious that they are ready to follow again, just as was the case with Moses, at least until they were hungry,...or worried,...or afraid.

But Jesus is not looking for people to follow simply because their stomachs no longer growl. He wants them to follow because they are hungry to partake of the ‘true bread from heaven’. He wants the people who are assembled before him to make a choice: follow the trappings of this world (those things that fade away, as represented by the bread that fills the stomach), or follow the One ‘who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’.

What’s your choice? Who will you follow?

There are points in our lives when we have to make a decision about what we believe in. Are we going to accept that conflict is a natural state of humanity (because we’ve seen so much of it that we think there is nothing we can do), or do we stand up for peace (and I’m talking about a real peace and not just the absence of war)? Are we going to believe that all is lost when a loved one is stricken with an illness that will eventually claim their life, when a job is lost, when a relationship breaks, or we will trust that even in the midst of the darkest valley there is a light of hope that can never be extinguished?

Basically, are we going to settle for what the world, this lost and broken world, has to offer, or are we going to stand up the things of God? Are we going to settle for bread? Or only be satisfied with the true bread from heaven?

I don’t know about you, but I’m going to stand up for peace, for hope even in the midst of difficulty, for the things of God that are found in and through the bread of life, Jesus Christ. That’s what I’m going to stand up for. I hope and pray that as you discern the answer to that question in your life, that you will come to understand that the bread of life, the person of Jesus Christ in whom we place our faith, is the one who is able to address all the needs that we have.

Let me say that again: Jesus is the one who is able to address all of your needs. The people of Israel had to learn that in their day as they transitioned from manna, a bread from heaven, to Jesus, the true bread from heaven.

We too have to learn this lesson.

Except in our case we have become accustomed to feeding off money, power, health. Let us understand that Jesus is able to answer all our needs.

The question is, are we willing to feed upon this bread of life?

As I have visited with different folks who are dealing with a variety of medical ailments, something that I have heard many times are different people asking in different ways, 'what can I do to 'fix' me?', as people grasp for straws that resemble control. They look to doctors and science and what is offered, so very often, are responses that end up feeling like Band-Aids that are not able to truly address the struggles that are being articulated, leaving them hungering for answers.

However, the answer that we long for is not found in the things of the world; instead it is found in our God who has promised that we will never be hungry that we will never be thirsty.

Can God work through the doctors and the science? You betcha.

Each of us have experienced that truth in a multitude of ways.

However, we need to know, we need to trust that the only way that we can make it through the difficulties that we ultimately face, is by leaning on the power and strength of God Almighty, who sent His son Jesus as the real bread from heaven.

Once again, the question comes around: in what will you place your faith? In the things of the world, or in the true bread from heaven?

Let the communion that we are about to partake be an affirmation that we lean upon the true bread from heaven.

After Sermon Prayer

The things of this world appear to answer all the needs that we have. For the Israelites this trapping was identified as bread. For us its science, money, power and influence. God, help us to see that these things are only able to satisfy in part, and never for long. Help to also understand that when we lean upon You, all that we need will be provided. God, help us to partake of the true bread from heaven. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.